

Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

(Adopted 1998)

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Preface to ICL Declaration of Principles

(Adopted 2010)

The Sixth Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), held in late 2010, voted to make a number of amendments to the ICL “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” adopted at the Third ICL Conference in 1998. In presenting these in the form of a preface rather than a revised edition of the Declaration, we follow the practice of our Marxist antecedents in addressing necessary extensions or additions to historic documents of the revolutionary workers movement.

Chief among the amendments is the position adopted at the Fifth ICL Conference in 2007 to oppose on principle running candidates for executive positions in the capitalist state. This is a logical extension of the position expressed in Point 11 of the Declaration of Principles: “Parliamentary governments formed by reformist workers parties (‘bourgeois workers parties’ as defined by Lenin) are capitalist governments administering capitalist rule.” The fundamental line between reform and revolution is the attitude toward the bourgeois state, i.e., the reformist view that one can take hold of the existing state apparatus and administer it in the interests of the workers, versus the Leninist understanding that the capitalist state apparatus must be smashed through proletarian revolution. While Marxists can run for and serve, as oppositionists, in bourgeois parliamentary bodies, seeking to use their positions as tribunes for revolutionary propaganda, the problem with running for executive offices—even when, as we did prior to 2007, asserting in advance that we would not accept such positions if elected—is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state. Our article “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State! Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics” (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 61, Spring 2009) elaborated the historical development of this understanding, indicating how it differed from the practice of our Leninist and Trotskyist forebears, a practice which issued in part from a partial and confused discussion on the question of parliamentarism at the 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International (CI). As the document of the Fifth ICL Conference stated: “In adopting the position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third International.... Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI.”

A second addition to the Declaration is the inclusion of Laos as one of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states along with China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. During the Vietnam War, as against all variants of petty-bourgeois pacifism, class collaboration and Stalinist nationalism, we raised the call: “All Indochina Must Go Communist!” The seizure of Saigon on 30 April 1975 by the forces of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam and the South Vietnamese National Liberation

Front signified the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution against U.S. imperialism and its South Vietnamese bourgeois/landlord puppet regime. When the Stalinist-led, peasant-based Pathet Lao guerrilla insurgents gained state power in Laos several weeks later, we wrote in the youth press of the Spartacist League/U.S.: “With its predominantly feudal and even pre-feudal tribal relations of production, a Laotian state established by the Stalinists would tend to lean on and take on the social character of the neighboring and more advanced Vietnamese and Chinese deformed workers states” (*Young Spartacus* No. 33, June 1975). However, in the subsequent years, we failed to codify the understanding that Laos is, and has been since the victory of the Indochinese Revolution, a deformed workers state. The Laotian Communists had always been closely linked with those in Vietnam. Once in power, the Laotian Stalinists went on to establish a regime based on proletarian property forms, in conjunction with and under the influence of the relatively more powerful and economically advanced Vietnamese deformed workers state.

Correctly stressing the central importance of the fight against capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, the homeland of the October Revolution, Point 3 of the Declaration notes “our active intervention for the revolutionary reunification of Germany” in 1989-90. Our fight for proletarian political revolution against the ultimately ascendant forces of capitalist reunification with West Germany represented the largest and most sustained intervention in the history of our tendency. As we noted in our assessment of the DDR [East Germany] intervention in the document of the 1992 Second Conference of the ICL (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93): “Although shaped by the disproportion of forces, there was in fact a contest between the ICL program of political revolution and the Stalinist program of capitulation and counterrevolution.”

We also take this opportunity to summarize previously codified corrections to several impressionistic statements in the Declaration of Principles. The reference to “‘market reforms’ counterrevolution in China” in Point 3 conflates the introduction of such measures with the imminence of capitalist counterrevolution. In the same vein, we argued that the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy “looks toward wholesale destruction of state industry, thereby posing the dismantling of what remains of the planned economy of the deformed workers state.” In fact, despite massive incursions of capitalist property, China remains a deformed workers state in which the industrial and financial core of the economy is based on collectivized, state-owned property. As a brittle, parasitic caste resting atop the socialized property, the Stalinist bureaucracy is incapable of implementing a cold, gradual restoration of capitalism from above. However, sooner or later the bureaucracy will fracture, posing pointblank the alternatives of capitalist restoration or proletarian political revolution.

The Declaration (in Point 7) also exaggerates the significance of centrist, anarchist and syndicalist currents in the post-Soviet period. When Trotsky wrote “Centrism and the Fourth International” in 1934, the radicalization within the workers movement resulting from the Great Depression and the bankruptcy of the Stalinized Comintern in the face of Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 generated significant left-centrist currents in the social-democratic parties. In contrast, there is little in the current political spectrum that is classically centrist, i.e., organizations in political motion, breaking to the left from reformism or to the right from revolutionism to reformism. Overwhelmingly, our opponents on

the left are today confirmed reformists, opponents of the internationalist revolutionary workers movement. Likewise the political signature of today's anarchists, who are in fact petty-bourgeois liberals, is not revulsion against the parliamentarist and class-collaborationist betrayals of Stalinism and social democracy but passionate anti-Communism. Nor is there anything approximating a genuinely anti-parliamentarist, revolutionary syndicalist current, as at the time of the Russian Revolution, in the workers movement today.

Lastly, we note that it is somewhat misleading and ahistorical to say that “the failure of the Bolshevik Party to explicitly recognize the vindication of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution by the October Revolution and the failure to explicitly repudiate the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry’ then became a conduit for the forces later posturing as the Bolshevik ‘old guard’ (e.g. Stalin) to attack Trotsky” (Point 10). In the first place, it was generally acknowledged in the Bolshevik Party during the period of Lenin's leadership that the revolution had conformed to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and the congruent perspective advanced by Lenin in his “April Theses” of 1917. Moreover, it is idealistic to presume that revolutionaries can, simply through codifying a correct theory, thereby close off a “conduit” for revisionism in a later reactionary period. As Trotsky subsequently explained in *The Stalin School of Falsification*, in launching an attack on “Trotskyism” (i.e., the internationalist principles of October) in 1924, the conservative, bureaucratic “Old Guard” was not restrained by anything he or Lenin had written or done in 1917. Trotsky later noted that the Thermidorean reaction won out over “the Opposition, the party and Lenin, not with ideas and arguments, but with its own social weight. The leaden rump of the bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution” (*The Revolution Betrayed* [1936]).

Unlike the erstwhile Stalinists and other revisionists, joined today by numerous dilettantes and political bandits ensconced in the virtual reality of cyberspace, who rotate through contradictory programmatic positions and even alleged principles in order to conform to changing opportunist appetites, authentic Marxists prize revolutionary continuity and programmatic consistency. That is why the ICL, uniquely among organizations on the left, makes available bound volumes of our earlier publications. We strive to forthrightly and explicitly indicate when we have refined or rejected, in light of subsequent experience or new research, previous positions as inadequate or wrong. This approach is central to our responsibility to act as guardians of the collective memory of the international proletariat.

—December 2010

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1. World Socialist Revolution and the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist tendency which is committed to the task of building Leninist parties as national sections of a democratic-centralist international whose purpose is to lead the working class to victory through socialist revolutions throughout the world.

Only the proletariat, through the seizure of political power and the destruction of capitalism as a world system, can lay the basis for the elimination of exploitation and the resolution of the contradiction between the growth of the productive forces of the world economy and national-state barriers. Capitalism has long since outlived its progressive historical role of creating a modern industrial economy. In order to maintain their rule, the national capitalist classes must exploit national, ethnic and racial divisions, which have been intensified since the destruction of the Soviet Union. Increasingly mutually hostile imperialist powers and rival blocs must oppress the peoples of the former colonial world and those still under the yoke of colonial peonage, impoverish the world's masses, engage in continual wars for the maintenance and redivision of the world markets in order to prop up the falling rate of profit, and attempt to smash the revolutionary struggle of the workers wherever it breaks out. In its final frenzied effort to maintain its class rule, the bourgeoisie will not hesitate to plunge humanity into nuclear holocaust or dictatorial oppression of unprecedented ferocity.

On the other hand, the victory of the proletariat on a world scale would place unimagined material abundance at the service of human needs, lay the basis for the elimination of classes and the eradication of social inequality based on sex and the very abolition of the social significance of race, nation and ethnicity. For the first time mankind will grasp the reins of history and control its own creation, society, resulting in an undreamed-of emancipation of human potential, and a monumental forward surge of civilization. Only then will it be possible to realize the free development of each individual as the condition for the free development of all. As Isaac Deutscher said in his speech, "On Socialist Man" (1966):

"We do not maintain that socialism is going to solve all predicaments of the human race. We are struggling in the first instance with the predicaments that are of man's making and that man can resolve. May I remind you that Trotsky, for instance, speaks of three basic tragedies—hunger, sex and death—besetting man. Hunger is the enemy that Marxism and the modern labour movement have taken on.... Yes, socialist man will still be pursued by sex and death; but we are convinced that he will be better equipped than we are to cope even with these."

2. The Crisis of Proletarian Leadership

The success or failure of the working class to achieve victory depends upon the organization and consciousness of the struggling masses, i.e., on **revolutionary leadership**. The revolutionary party is the indispensable weapon of the working people for their victory.

The ruling class has at its command a monopoly of the means of violence, its dominant political and bureaucratic apparatus, its enormous wealth and connections, and its control of education, the mass media and all other institutions of capitalist society. Against such a force a workers state can be brought into existence only by a proletariat fully conscious of its tasks, organized to carry them out, and determined to defend its conquests against the counterrevolutionary violence of the ruling class.

Through its acquisition of political consciousness the working class ceases to be merely a class in itself and becomes a class **for** itself, conscious of its historic task to seize state power and reorganize society.

Such consciousness is not spontaneously generated in the course of the day-to-day class struggles of the workers; it must be brought to the workers by the revolutionary party. Thus it is the task of the revolutionary party to forge the proletariat into a sufficient political force by infusing it with a consciousness of its real situation, educating it in the historical lessons of the class struggle, tempering it in ever deepening struggles, destroying its illusions, steeling its revolutionary will and self-confidence, and organizing the overthrow of all forces standing in the way of the conquest of power. A conscious working class is the decisive force in history.

The indispensable nature of the task of forging a vanguard party and honing its revolutionary edge in preparation for the inevitable revolutionary crises is underscored in the imperialist epoch. As Trotsky pointed out in *The Third International After Lenin* (1928):

“The revolutionary character of the epoch does not lie in that it permits of the accomplishment of the revolution, that is, the seizure of power at every given moment. Its revolutionary character consists in profound and sharp fluctuations and abrupt and frequent transitions from an immediately revolutionary situation.... This is the sole source from which flows the full significance of revolutionary strategy in contradistinction to tactics. Thence also flows the new significance of the party and the party leadership.... [Today] every new sharp change in the political situation to the Left places the decision in the hands of the revolutionary party. Should it miss the critical situation, the latter veers around to its opposite. Under these circumstances the role of the party leadership acquires exceptional importance. The words of Lenin to the effect that two or three days can decide the fate of the international revolution would have been almost incomprehensible in the epoch of the Second International. In our epoch, on the contrary, these words have only too often been confirmed and, with the exception of the October, always from the negative side.”

3. We Are the Party of the Russian Revolution

The October 1917 Russian Revolution took the Marxist doctrine of proletarian revolution out of the realm of theory and gave it reality, creating a society where those who labored ruled through the dictatorship of the proletariat. This proletarian revolution led by the Bolshevik Party *in* Russia was not made solely *for* Russia. For revolutionary Marxists, the Russian Revolution was seen as the opening shot of a necessarily international struggle of labor against the rule of capital worldwide. Lenin’s Bolsheviks broke the capitalist chain at its weakest link, understanding that unless the proletarian revolution was extended to the major capitalist powers, most immediately Germany, an isolated dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia could not long survive.

The opportunities were manifold, but the new revolutionary parties outside Russia were too new, that is, too weak and politically immature, to pursue them. In Europe, especially Germany, the Social Democracy served its bourgeois masters, helping restabilize their order and joining with them in hostility to the October Revolution. Elsewhere, in less developed nations and regions, the main ideological obstacle and force against Bolshevism was nationalism.

The pressure of imperialist encirclement, the devastation of the Russian working class in the Civil War and the lengthy isolation of the Russian Revolution enabled a bureaucratic layer headed by Stalin to usurp political power in a political counterrevolution in 1923-24, what Trotsky called the “Soviet Thermidor.” While resting on and deriving its privileges from proletarian property forms of the Soviet degenerated workers state, the Stalinist bureaucracy was not irrevocably committed to their defense. Stalin’s “theory” of “socialism in one country,” expressing the nationally limited interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy, turned the Communist International from an instrument of the world revolution into a new obstacle.

Stalin’s “socialism in one country” was a rejection of the fundamental principles of Marxism. *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) concludes, “Workingmen of all countries, unite!” The Revolutions of 1848 signaled the opening of the modern era—the bourgeoisie made common cause with reaction in the face of a proletariat already perceived as threatening to capitalist rule. As Engels wrote in his “Principles of Communism” (1847):

“Question 19: Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?

“Answer: No. Large-scale industry, already by creating the world market, has so linked up all the peoples of the earth, and especially the civilised peoples, that each people is dependent on what happens to another. Further, in all civilised countries large-scale industry has so levelled social development that in all these countries the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have become the two decisive classes of society and the struggle between them the main struggle of the day. The communist revolution will therefore be no merely national one.... It is a worldwide revolution and will therefore be worldwide in scope.”

In opposition to Stalin’s nationalist opportunism, Trotsky’s Left Opposition was founded on the program of authentic Marxism which animated the Bolshevik Revolution. The Left Opposition fought to preserve and extend the gains of the Russian Revolution which had been betrayed but not yet overthrown. In his searing analysis of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and the explosive contradictions of Soviet society (*The Revolution Betrayed*, 1936) Trotsky posed the choice starkly: “Will the bureaucrat devour the workers’ state, or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat?” Trotsky’s prophetic warning was vindicated, bitterly, in the negative.

The anti-internationalist doctrine of “socialism in one country” resulted in a disastrous careening from ultraleft adventures to class collaboration. Trotsky characterized Stalin as the “gravedigger” of revolutionary struggles abroad, from the second Chinese Revolution in 1925-27 and the British General Strike of 1926 to Germany, where the CP, as well as the Social Democrats, allowed Hitler to come to power without firing a shot. In the context of the German betrayal, and the Comintern’s subsequent codification of the explicitly anti-revolutionary line of building popular fronts, which found its fullest expression in the Stalinists’ criminal strangulation of the Spanish Revolution, the Trotskyists organized the Fourth International, which was founded in 1938.

The planned economy in the Soviet Union (and the bureaucratically deformed workers states which elsewhere later arose on the Stalinist model) proved its superiority over capitalist anarchy in the period of rapid development. But the relentless pressure of continuing economic encirclement by the still world-dominant capitalist mode of production through the world market was inexorable without international extension of the revolution. Trotsky wrote in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

“The question formulated by Lenin—***Who shall prevail?***—is a question of the correlation of forces between the Soviet Union and the world revolutionary proletariat on the one hand, and on the other international capital and the hostile forces within the [Soviet] Union.... Military intervention is a danger. The intervention of cheap goods in the baggage trains of a capitalist army would be an incomparably greater one.”

The Fourth International’s organizational weakness, lack of deep roots in the proletariat, and theoretical incapacity and disorientation after WW II contributed heavily to the political break in continuity with the program of Trotsky’s Fourth International. The prior decimation of Trotskyist cadres throughout Europe at the hands of fascist and Stalinist repression—and the massacres of Trotskyists in Vietnam and jailing of Trotskyists in China, countries where the Left Opposition had found significant bases of support—gutted the movement of experienced cadres at a crucial moment.

The expansion of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe after the war posed a new programmatic challenge to the Trotskyist movement against which formal “orthodoxy” was an insufficient defense. After an uninterrupted string of defeats and betrayals, from China (1927) and Germany (1933) to the Spanish Civil War, and Stalin’s murderous purges, the existence of the Soviet Union had been placed in grave danger. The Red Army defeated Hitler ***despite Stalin*** who—after beheading the Soviet military through his bloody purges on the eve of World War II—further sabotaged the military defense of the Soviet Union through his faith first in Hitler and then in the “democratic” allies.

Yet the Red Army’s victory over fascism greatly enhanced the authority of the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet Union, an eventuality not foreseen by Trotsky. The West European Stalinists emerged from WW II at the head of the mass organizations of militant workers of Italy, France and elsewhere. Meanwhile, in Soviet-occupied East Europe, capitalist property was expropriated and a collectivized economy established through a bureaucratically controlled social revolution, producing deformed workers states modeled on the Stalinist-ruled USSR.

Conditioned in part by the Vietnam War and internal turmoil racking the U.S., not least the black liberation struggle, the late 1960s/early 1970s saw a series of prerevolutionary and revolutionary situations in Europe—France 1968, Italy 1969, Portugal 1974-75. These represented the best opportunities for proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries since the immediate post-World War II period. It was the pro-Moscow Communist Parties which again managed to preserve the shaken bourgeois order in this region. Here the counterrevolutionary role of the Western Stalinist parties contributed immeasurably to the subsequent destruction of the Soviet Union. The restabilization of the bourgeois order in the Western imperialist states in the mid-1970s was immediately followed by a new Cold War offensive against the Soviet bloc.

The Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy—in the absence of the proletariat as a contender for power—had sooner or later to turn to “market socialism,” which, along with appeasement of U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan and brokering capitalist restoration throughout East Europe, opened wide the floodgates to capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union in 1991-92. The proletariat, leaderless, did not resist, spelling the destruction of the workers state.

The 1979 “Iranian Revolution” opened up a period of ascendant political Islam in the historically Muslim world, a development which contributed to and was powerfully reinforced by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union. Khomeini’s seizure and consolidation of power in Iran was a defeat akin to Hitler’s crushing of the German proletariat in 1933, albeit on a narrower, regional scale. The international Spartacist tendency’s slogan “Down with the Shah! No support to the mullahs!” and our focus on the woman question (“No to the veil!”) stood in sharp opposition to the rest of the left’s capitulation to mullah-led reaction.

The preservation of proletarian power depends principally on the political **consciousness** and **organization** of the working class. After the physical liquidation of the revolutionary wing of the Bolsheviks by Stalin, all continuity with the traditions of the October Revolution was systematically expunged from the memory of the working class. In Soviet mass consciousness, suffused with the Russian-nationalist propaganda churned out by Stalin, World War II came to supplant the October Revolution as the epochal event in Soviet history. In the end, Stalin and his heirs succeeded in imprinting their nationalist outlook on the Soviet peoples; proletarian internationalism came to be sneered at as an obscure “Trotskyite heresy” of “export of revolution” or else cynically emptied of content.

Atomized and bereft of any anti-capitalist leadership, lacking any coherent and consistent socialist class consciousness, and skeptical about the possibility of class struggle in the capitalist countries, the Soviet working class did not rally in resistance against the encroaching capitalist counterrevolution. And, as Trotsky noted in *The Third International After Lenin*: “If an army capitulates to the enemy in a critical situation without a battle, then this capitulation completely takes the place of a ‘decisive battle,’ in politics as in war.”

An analysis of the terminal crisis of Stalinism is provided in *Spartacist* No. 45-46 (Winter 1990-91) in documents by Joseph Seymour, “On the Collapse of Stalinist Rule in East Europe,” and Albert St. John, “For Marxist Clarity and a Forward Perspective,” and the August 1993 Spartacist Pamphlet, *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*. As was noted in Seymour’s document:

“During his long struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy Trotsky considered a number of **different** paths whereby capitalism might be restored in the Soviet Union.... Trotsky used the phrase ‘running backwards the film of reformism’ to polemicize against those professed leftists who maintained that the Stalin regime had **already** transformed the USSR into a bourgeois state through a gradual and organic process—Bernsteinism in reverse.... Trotsky’s view that a capitalist counterrevolution, as well as a proletarian political revolution, in Stalin’s Russia would entail civil war was a **prognosis**, not a dogma. It was predicated on resistance by the working class, not resistance by conservative elements of the bureaucratic apparatus. That is how the question is posed in *The Revolution Betrayed*.... The decisive

element is the **consciousness** of the Soviet working class, which is **not static** but is affected by innumerable shifting factors domestically and internationally.”

As St. John noted:

“Unlike the anarchistic bourgeois economy the planned socialist economy is not built automatically but **consciously**. Therefore, [Trotsky] writes, ‘Progress towards socialism is inseparable from that state power which is desirous of socialism or which is constrained to desire it’ [“The Workers State, Thermidor and Bonapartism,” 1935]. Thus, he concluded, without the intervention of a conscious proletarian vanguard, the collapse of the Stalinist political regime would lead inevitably to the liquidation of the planned economy and to restoration of private property.”

The “Russian question” has been the defining political question of the 20th century and the touchstone for revolutionaries. We Trotskyists stayed at our posts and fought to preserve and extend the revolutionary gains of the working class while every other tendency on the planet capitulated to the ideological pressure of imperialist anti-communism. Above all our defense of the USSR was expressed in our fight for new October Revolutions around the world.

Responsibility for the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union lies also with all manner of reformists and centrists who lined up behind their own capitalist rulers against the USSR, including backing every reactionary movement from Polish Solidarność to the Islamic fundamentalist butchers in Afghanistan. The devastating and worldwide consequences of the Soviet counterrevolution also destroy on the theoretical level the anti-Marxist theories that the Stalinist bureaucracy was “state capitalist,” according to which the Soviet counterrevolution would have been merely a shift from one form of capitalism to another.

The ascendancy of Boris Yeltsin and capitalist-restorationist forces in August 1991 was a pivotal event in determining the fate of the Soviet Union, but the final undoing of the October Revolution was not a foregone conclusion. Spartacists distributed throughout the Soviet Union over 100,000 copies in Russian of our August 1991 article, “Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!” There we wrote that workers mobilizations should have cleaned out the counterrevolutionary rabble on Yeltsin’s barricades, thus opening the road to proletarian political revolution. We called for a political revolution to defeat capitalist restoration and return the Soviet proletariat to political power. Only those who were under the sway of capitalist ideology or its material perquisites were in a hurry to write off the Soviet Union at that time. The absence of resistance by a working class that had been betrayed and atomized by decades of Stalinist misrule and fierce repression was the decisive factor in the destruction of the Soviet workers state.

Our defense of the USSR was not limited to our program for the USSR: **unconditional military defense** against imperialism and internal counterrevolution; for **proletarian political revolution** to oust the bureaucracy and return the USSR to the road of Lenin and Trotsky. It was expressed also in our unconditional military defense of the Vietnamese Revolution; in our opposition to Solidarność’s drive sponsored by Wall Street and the Vatican to overturn the Polish deformed workers state; in our call to

“Hail Red Army in Afghanistan—Extend social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples!”; in our active intervention for the revolutionary reunification of Germany.

History speaks its verdicts loudly. The ascendancy of counterrevolution in the former USSR is an unparalleled defeat for working people all over the world, decisively altering the political landscape on this planet. No longer challenged by Soviet military might, U.S. imperialism has proclaimed a “one-superpower world,” running roughshod over semicolonial peoples from the Persian Gulf to Haiti. No longer the unrivaled economic powerhouse of world imperialism, the United States still maintains the murderous advantage of its military might, while often preferring to camouflage its terror under the “humanitarian” fig leaf of the United Nations’ “den of thieves” (Lenin’s description of the UN’s predecessor, the League of Nations). But rival imperialisms, especially Germany and Japan, no longer constrained by anti-Soviet unity, are pursuing apace their own appetites for control of world markets and concomitantly projecting their military power. In the conflicts between rival regional trade blocs today, the outlines of future wars are sharpening. In the face of growing interimperialist rivalry, we reassert: ***“The main enemy is at home!”***

Looking back retrospectively to the pre-World War I period, today’s “post-Cold War world” presents many parallels. And with the question posed of new interimperialist conflict, we can expect today’s reformists and centrists to act in the spirit of their social-democratic forebears of 4 August 1914 in backing their own rulers in wartime. Fully in this spirit was their support for counterrevolution in the USSR.

Alongside mass pauperization in the USSR, “ethnic cleansing” fratricide rages throughout the weak new capitalist states of East Europe and former Soviet republics where nationalist ideology substituted for nonexistent capital as the motor force of counterrevolution. Often a resurgence of the pre-World War II national antagonisms in the capitalist states of this region, in the aftermath of counterrevolution, nationalist ideology again becomes the chief roadblock which revolutionaries have to smash through.

In West Europe the safety net of social welfare measures is slashed as the bourgeoisies no longer see any need to stave off the “spectre of communism” by providing necessities. While the ideological climate of the “death of communism” affects the consciousness of the proletariat, in many countries of the world sharp class struggle provides the objective basis for the regeneration of Marxism as the theory of scientific socialism and proletarian revolution. It is not communism, but its parody, Stalinism, which has been shown to be a dead end.

Victorious counterrevolution has not only devastated the ex-Soviet and East European proletariats materially and ideologically; in a whole series of countries (e.g., Italy, France) where Communist parties commanded the allegiance of advanced layers of the working class, the proletariat has been sold the lie that “socialism has failed,” promoted by the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies who had headed these deformed workers states and presided over their destruction. The Kremlin abetted by the East German Stalinists led the counterrevolution in the DDR, rushing to hand the country over to the Fourth Reich. The Kremlin bureaucracy under Gorbachev carried out its ultimate, terminal betrayal, declaring that socialism had been a doomed utopian experiment and proclaiming the superiority of the capitalist market system. The disintegrating CPSU spawned openly counterrevolutionary gangs led by Boris

Yeltsin who acted as the open agent of U.S. imperialism in the restoration of capitalism. Hence the Stalinist ruling castes and their cothinkers in the West bear direct responsibility for the destruction of the socialist aspirations of the advanced proletarian layers in Western Europe and elsewhere.

Trotsky's assertion in the 1938 Transitional Program that "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat" predates the present deep regression of proletarian consciousness. The reality of this post-Soviet period adds a new dimension to Trotsky's observation. The only way in which this regression can be overcome and the working class can become a class *for* itself, i.e., fighting for socialist revolution, is to reforge an international Leninist-Trotskyist party as the leadership of the working class. Marxism must once again win the allegiance of the proletariat.

In China, the extreme nationalist ideology pushed by the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy is a direct bridge to capitalist restoration. The essence of "market reforms" counterrevolution in China is the bureaucracy seeking to become partners in exploitation with capitalist forces and especially the Chinese capitalists who were not destroyed as a class (as were their Russian counterparts after October 1917) but continued to function in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and elsewhere. China has carved out "special economic zones" as islands of imperialist exploitation and keeps the reverted Hong Kong's capitalist economy untouched, while the army and bureaucracy generally are engaged in large-scale business ventures. Now the bureaucracy, sections of which seek to become the new capitalist exploiters, looks toward wholesale destruction of state industry, thereby posing the dismantling of what remains of the planned economy of the deformed workers state.

This course cannot be accomplished without breaking the resistance of the militant working class. The ruling Stalinist bureaucracy showed in Tiananmen Square in 1989—an incipient political revolution—both its fear of the proletariat and its intention to rely on brute force with no trappings of "*glasnost*" (Soviet leader Gorbachev's political "openness"). The choices for China are ***proletarian political revolution or capitalist counterrevolution***. The crucial factor is revolutionary leadership to reintroduce the internationalist class consciousness which animated the founding Chinese Communists of the early 1920s. The battle for workers political revolution in China has enormous stakes for the workers internationally. The outcome will have a huge impact in the remaining deformed workers states (Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea) and also in Asian countries like Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, where a militant young proletariat has emerged as a powerful factor.

4. The Theoretical and Historical Roots of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

As Trotsky described in his 1937 article, "Stalinism and Bolshevism": "Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions, the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow: it must swim against the current." In this post-Soviet period, where Marxism is widely

misidentified with Stalinism, there is a revival of everything from anarchist sympathies to anti-materialist idealism and mysticism. Karl Marx explained: “**Religious** suffering is at one and the same time the **expression** of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of the soulless conditions. It is the **opium** of the people. The abolition of religion as the **illusory** happiness of the people is the demand for their **real** happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to **call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions**” (“Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” 1844).

The International Communist League bases itself on Marxist historical, dialectical materialism and continues the revolutionary traditions of the international working-class movement exemplified in the 1840s British Chartist movement and the Polish Party “Proletariat” (1882-86), the first workers party in the tsarist empire. We stand on the work of revolutionists such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Above all we look to the experience of the Bolshevik Party which culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917, the only revolution as yet made by the working class. This history illuminates where we come from, what we seek to defend and where we want to go.

We seek in particular to carry forward the international working-class perspectives of Marxism as developed in theory and practice by V.I. Lenin and L.D. Trotsky, as embodied in the decisions of the first four Congresses of the Communist International and by the 1938 Transitional Program and other key documents of the Fourth International, such as “War and the Fourth International” (1934). These materials are the indispensable documentary codification of the communist movement internationally, and are fundamental to the revolutionary tasks of our organization.

In this epoch of capitalism in advanced decay, we communists who have as our aim the proletarian conquest of state power and the reconstruction of society on a new egalitarian socialist basis are at the same time the most consistent defenders of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the gains of the bourgeois revolution: we are intransigent fighters for bourgeois-democratic liberties—for the right to bear arms; for the abolition of all monarchy and aristocratic privilege; for the separation of church and state; against the imposition of religious fundamentalism as a political program; for the defense of free speech and assembly against the encroachment of the bourgeois state; against barbaric “punishments” such as the death penalty; for juridical equality for women and minorities.

We are also intransigent defenders of **proletarian** rights as described in James Burnham’s pamphlet, *The Peoples’ Front—The New Betrayal* (1937): “There exists under capitalist democracy, to one or another extent, a third group of rights which are not, properly speaking, ‘democratic rights’ at all, but rather **proletarian** rights. These are such rights as the rights to picket and to strike and to organize. The historical origin of these rights is in all cases to be found in the **independent** struggle of the proletariat **against** the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state.”

We also look for inspiration to James P. Cannon, a leader of the early American Communist Party who was won over to Trotskyism at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and struggled to crystallize a Trotskyist formation, initially in the Communist Party, and to embed it in working-class struggle. Cannon was a principal founder of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). His struggle to build a proletarian party, forge a Leninist collective party leadership (rejecting the permanent factionalism of

the early CP and opposing the cliquist intrigues which plagued, e.g., the French Trotskyists) and the 1939-40 fight against the petty-bourgeois opposition in the SWP (Shachtman and Burnham) which defected from Trotskyism over the Russian question—this is the revolutionary heritage which the ICL upholds.

However partially and mainly on his own national terrain, Cannon fought against the Pabloist revisionist current which arose in the post-World War II Trotskyist movement. In our basic documents (see especially “Genesis of Pabloism,” *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972), while being sharply critical of the errors of the anti-Pabloites, ***we stand with them on this crucial fight for the survival of Trotskyism.*** Pabloism is characterized chiefly by a renunciation of the necessity for revolutionary leadership and an adaptation to existing Stalinist, social-democratic and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships. Following the creation of deformed workers states in East Europe, Pablo predicted “centuries of deformed workers states” and claimed that the Stalinist parties could “roughly outline a revolutionary orientation.”

Ill-equipped to explain the extension of Stalinism, Cannon and the orthodox Trotskyists first sought to ward off liquidationist conclusions by denying reality (e.g., refusing to recognize China as a deformed workers state until 1955). Cannon fought against Pablo’s rejection of the proletariat as the only class capable of transforming society and the denial of the need for a Trotskyist vanguard party. But this fight was never really fully carried through internationally. Denial of proletarian centrality lay behind every one of Pablo’s (and later Ernest Mandel’s) mainly vicarious experiments in revisionism (e.g., the “guerrilla road,” students as the “new mass vanguard”).

The origins of the International Communist League are in the Spartacist League/U.S. which began as the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP and based itself primarily upon the British Socialist Labour League document, *World Prospect for Socialism* (1961), and two documents by the Revolutionary Tendency, *In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective* (1962) and especially *Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International* (1963), the latter submitted to the SWP’s 1963 Convention. At its founding conference in 1966, the Spartacist League/U.S. adopted a Declaration of Principles (see SL/U.S. *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9) which served as the model for this International Declaration of Principles. The International Communist League, by contributing to the theoretical clarification of the Marxist movement and to the reforging of the workers’ necessary organizational weapons, upholds the revolutionary proletarian principles of Marxism and will carry them forward to the vanguard of the working class.

“By its very nature opportunism is nationalistic, since it rests on the local and temporary needs of the proletariat and not on its historic tasks.... International unity is not a decorative facade for us, but the very axis of our theoretical views and our policy” (Leon Trotsky, “The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition,” 1929). From its inception as a small handful of young Trotskyists bureaucratically expelled from the SWP, the Spartacist League’s perspective and actions were directed toward the rebirth of the Fourth International and against American-centeredness.

In 1974 the *Declaration for the Organization of an International Trotskyist Tendency* was adopted, formally constituting the international Spartacist tendency. This document sharply attacked the

federated, non-Bolshevik practices of our pseudo-Trotskyist competitors, the SWP, United Secretariat and Gerry Healy's International Committee, all of whom hid behind the paper tiger of the blatantly undemocratic U.S. Voorhis Act to evade the practice of revolutionary Leninist internationalism. In contrast the iSt (forerunner to the ICL) forthrightly declared that it would be governed by the principle of international democratic-centralism.

The first delegated international conference held in 1979 elected an international executive committee. Since then the ICL has marked modest achievements in the international extension of our tendency to Latin America and South Africa and further extensions in Europe and Asia. This international growth has been a vital counterweight to the deforming pressures of our largest section existing in the protracted relatively reactionary political climate of the United States.

In 1989 the iSt became the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

Stalinism dragged the banner of communism through the mud while systematically perverting the understanding of every basic principle and term of Marxism, and the general level of identification of human progress with the idea of communism stands at a relative low point. But the workings of capitalist imperialism generate anew a raw subjective hatred of oppression among millions across the globe. The absence of genuinely communist leadership is acutely felt by many and the program of Leninist internationalism can be put forward with great impact.

Investment by imperialists in some low-wage "Third World" countries has created proletarian concentrations in hitherto unlikely areas for major conflicts between labor and capital. In our effort to further extend our party beyond the advanced Western countries, we seek to infuse our international with the courage of Bolsheviks like Kote Tsintsadze:

"It took altogether extraordinary conditions like czarism, illegality, prison, and deportation, many years of struggle against the Mensheviks, and especially the experience of three revolutions to produce fighters like Kote Tsintsadze.... The Communist parties in the West have not yet brought up fighters of Tsintsadze's type. This is their besetting weakness, determined by historical reasons but nonetheless a weakness. The Left Opposition in the Western countries is not an exception in this respect and it must well take note of it."

— Trotsky, "At the Fresh Grave of Kote Tsintsadze," 7 January 1931

5. The International Character of the Socialist Revolution

Historic experience has shown that the road to socialism can be opened only through the creation of dual power culminating in the destruction of the capitalist state and the victory of the workers state and development of a new social order. The police, military, bureaucratic, juridical, and political apparatus of the old order cannot be reformed to serve the proletariat's interests, but must be smashed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat—a **workers government** based on councils of working people and supported by the workers' armed strength. Such a state would defend itself against the counterrevolutionary efforts of the deposed ruling class to return to power and would reorganize the

economy along rational lines. As the economic basis of social classes dwindles, the workers state would more and more assume a purely administrative function, finally withering away with the advent of classless communism. But to realize this aim requires the destruction of capitalist imperialism as a world system and the establishment of a world socialist division of labor.

The international character of the working class gives it a potentially enormous superiority over the bourgeoisie, as capitalism operates by anarchistic methods which set one national capitalist class against another and constantly create new unevenness and crises. In order to realize this superiority, the proletariat needs an international party to unify the class across national and other divisions and to coordinate the interdependent struggles of the workers of every country. While the revolution may begin in a single country, any partial victory will be secured only with the spread of revolution to other countries and the eventual world dominance of socialist economic organization. We fight to ***reforge the Fourth International***, the world party of socialist revolution, whose program and purposes remain as valid today as at its founding in 1938.

A Leninist party is not simply built through linear recruitment, but through programmatically based splits with opportunists, as well as fusions with revolutionary elements breaking from centrism. Particularly when fusions are undertaken across national boundaries, there must be a thorough period of testing to establish solid underlying political agreement. We aim to bring together groups whose orientation is toward the achievement of new October Revolutions—nothing else, nothing other, nothing less.

6. The Vanguard Role of the Working Class in the Defense of All the Oppressed

Central to the Marxist perspective of world socialism is the vanguard role of the working class, and particularly the decisive weight of the proletariat of the industrialized countries. Only the working class has the social power and compulsion of clear objective interest to liberate mankind from oppression. Having no stake in maintaining the bourgeois order, its enormous power rests in its productive role, its numbers and organization.

The continued rule of a small handful of capitalists is maintained only through keeping the working class divided and confused as to its true situation. In the United States, the ruling class succeeded in exploiting deep divisions in the proletariat, first along religious and ethnic and later along racial lines. As part of an oppressed race-color caste, the black workers are doubly oppressed and require special modes of struggle (for example, transitional organizations such as labor/black struggle leagues). The working class transcends such divisions only through struggle and highly reversibly. Socialism in the United States will be achieved only by the common struggle of black and white workers under the leadership of a multiracial revolutionary vanguard.

The U.S. black question is defined by the particular history of the United States: slavery, the Civil War defeat of the Southern slavocracy by Northern industrial capitalism and the bourgeoisie's betrayal of Radical Reconstruction's promise of equality, leading to the racist segregation of black people despite

the economic integration of black toilers into the proletariat at the bottom. The forcible segregation of blacks, integral to American capitalism, has been resisted by the black masses whenever a perceived possibility for such struggle has been felt. Hence our program for the U.S. is revolutionary integrationism—the full integration of blacks into an egalitarian, **socialist** America—and our program of “black liberation through socialist revolution.”

Modern capitalism, i.e., imperialism, reaching into all areas of the planet, in the course of the class struggle and as economic need demands, brings into the proletariat at its bottom new sources of cheaper labor, principally immigrants from poorer and less-developed regions of the world—workers with few rights who are deemed more disposable in times of economic contraction. Thus capitalism in ongoing fashion creates different strata among the workers, while simultaneously amalgamating the workers of many different lands. Everywhere, the capitalists, abetted by aristocracy-of-labor opportunists, try to poison class consciousness and solidarity among the workers by fomenting religious, national and ethnic divisions. The struggle for the unity and integrity of the working class against chauvinism and racism is thus a vital task for the proletarian vanguard.

Today anti-immigrant bigotry defines racist/rightist politics and is an acid test for the workers movement and left from West Europe to South Africa to East Asia. The ICL fights against deportations—for full citizenship rights for all immigrants! For labor/minority mobilizations to stop the fascists! For workers defense guards! For multiracial/ multiethnic workers militias against communalist violence!

Fascist demagogues feed off unemployment, immiseration and insecurity endemic to the capitalist system. Fascist terror and government attacks on immigrants and other oppressed minorities can be combatted effectively only from the perspective of overthrowing the capitalist system and replacing it with an internationally planned and collectivized economy. As Trotsky wrote in 1930 when under the impact of the Great Depression the Nazi Party emerged as a real threat to take power in Germany: “The **Soviet United States of Europe**—that is the only correct slogan which points the way out of the splintering of Europe, which threatens not only Germany but all of Europe with complete economic and cultural decline” (“The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany,” 26 September 1930).

The oppression of women, youth, minorities and all sectors of the oppressed must be analyzed and addressed in each country to find the most favorable point at which to apply the Marxist lever. As Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902): “...the Social-Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but **the tribune of the people**, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth **before all** his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for **all** and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.”

The ICL fights for women’s liberation through socialist revolution. In countries of belated capitalist development, the acute oppression and degradation of women is deeply rooted in pre-capitalist

“tradition” and religious obscurantism. In these countries the fight against women’s oppression is therefore a motor force of revolutionary struggle. The condition of women in the most advanced capitalist countries, while far different, shows the limits of freedom and social progress under capitalism; revolutionists are the most consistent champions of women’s elementary democratic rights such as free legal abortion and “equal pay for equal work.” The reactionary social climate aggravated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concerted campaign to roll back “welfare state” protections of the masses has brought a sharp rise in anti-sex, anti-woman and anti-homosexual bigotry. We oppose all laws against crimes without victims, including those which criminalize homosexual or other consensual sexual activity, prostitution and drug use.

The oppression of women, the oldest social inequality in human history, goes back to the beginning of private property and will not be abolished short of the abolition of class-divided society. The fundamental social institution oppressing women is the family, whose function in the raising of the next generation must be superseded, with women’s household labor replaced by collective institutions in a socialist society. We stand on the Bolsheviks’ record of special organized work among women to win them to the socialist cause, described in early issues of the SL/U.S. journal *Women and Revolution*.

While fighting against every manifestation of bourgeois injustice, we oppose sectoralism, which denies the possibility of consciousness transcending an individual’s own experience of oppression, and fight to unite the vanguard of all oppressed social layers behind the proletariat in the fight for socialism.

Open the road to the youth! Key to building the international proletarian revolutionary party is the struggle to win a new generation of youth to the principles and program of Trotskyism. This includes not only the struggle to recruit young workers but also work among students. A particularly volatile layer of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, students can play an active role in “radical” activities of either the left or the right. We seek to win students to the side of the working class, recognizing like Lenin that a revolutionary party is built through the fusion of declassed revolutionary intellectuals with the most advanced layers of the proletariat. Youth serve a particular role as the cannon fodder for the wars and other military adventures of the capitalist rulers. Our opposition to the bourgeois army and to conscription is antithetical to that of pacifists or those who seek a petty-bourgeois exemption from an obligation imposed on working-class youth in many countries. We go in with our class with the purpose of winning proletarian soldiers to the program and purpose of communist revolution. In a revolutionary situation we understand that key to proletarian victory is the splitting of the conscript army along class lines.

Through our youth work we seek to recruit and train the future cadres of the revolutionary party through establishing transitional youth organizations which are both organizationally independent of and politically subordinate to the revolutionary party.

7. The Bourgeois Basis of Revisionism

Insofar as revolutionary consciousness is not prevalent among the workers, their consciousness is determined by the ideology of the ruling class. Objectively capitalism rules through the power of

capital, its monopoly of the means of violence, and its control of all existing social institutions. But it prefers, when possible, to rule with the “consent” of the masses through the dominance of bourgeois ideology among the oppressed, fostering illusions and concealing its bloody essence. Nationalism, patriotism, racism and religion penetrate into the organizations of the workers, centrally through the agency of the petty-bourgeois “labor lieutenants”—the parasitic trade-union, social-democratic and Stalinist-derived bureaucracies based on the privileged upper strata of the working class. If not replaced by revolutionary leaderships, these reformists will allow the organizations of the workers to become impotent in the fight for the economic needs of the workers under conditions of bourgeois democracy or even allow these organizations to be destroyed by victorious fascism.

In his 1916 work on *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin laid out the material basis of the opportunism of the labor bureaucracy:

“The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the numerous branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries, etc., makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, and for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or given nation against all the others. The intensification of antagonisms between imperialist nations for the division of the world increases this urge. And so there is created that bond between imperialism and opportunism.... The most dangerous of all in this respect are those [like the Menshevik, Martov] who do not wish to understand that the fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism.”

The degeneration and capitulation of tendencies within the Marxist movement has been of especially critical value to the preservation of imperialist rule. Submission to the pressure of bourgeois society has repeatedly thrust nominally Marxist currents toward **revisionism**, the process of ruling out Marxism’s essential conclusion that the state is an instrument of class rule. Bernsteinian revisionism, Menshevism, Stalinism and its Maoist variant—all are illustrations of this process which constitutes a bridge to overtly reformist practices. Globally, besides the Stalinists and the Social Democrats, **nationalists** and **the politically religious** heavily work to derail working-class struggle.

Centrism is that programmatically heterogeneous and theoretically amorphous current in the workers movement that occupies numerous shadings in the political spectrum between Marxism and reformism, between revolutionary internationalism and opportunist social patriotism. As Trotsky noted in his 1934 article, “Centrism and the Fourth International”:

“For a revolutionary Marxist the struggle against reformism is now almost fully replaced by the struggle against centrism.... The struggle with hidden or masked opportunists must therefore be transferred chiefly to the sphere of **practical conclusions from revolutionary requisites**.”

In situations of sharp class struggle, the centrist pretenders who form part of the syphilitic chain maintaining bourgeois class rule become both more dangerous and more vulnerable to revolutionary exposure. The revolutionary Trotskyist vanguard will grow at the expense of our centrist opponents, or

vice versa. The outcome of this confrontation between Marxism and centrism is a crucial factor in the success or failure of the revolution.

It is the unappealing reformist performance of social democracy and Stalinism that generated a revival of anarchism, an anti-Marxist ideology based on radical democratic idealism, which had been rendered moribund in the early years of this century by the revolutionary Marxism of the Bolsheviks. Similarly among unionists a revival of anti-political syndicalist moods is attributable to disgust with the behavior of all the old “socialist” parliamentarians; but this retreat to “pure” economic struggle only allows militant struggle to burn itself out without ever really challenging the reformist traitors.

8. The Struggle Against Imperialist War

Leon Trotsky codified the program of proletarian internationalist opposition to the wars inevitably engendered by decaying capitalism in his 1934 document “War and the Fourth International.” As Trotsky noted: “***The transformation of imperialist war into civil war*** is that general strategic task to which the whole work of a proletarian party during war should be subordinated.” In interimperialist wars such as WW I and WW II, and in other wars between two relatively equally developed capitalist states, our basic principle is ***revolutionary defeatism***: irreconcilable opposition to the capitalist slaughter and a recognition that ***defeat of one’s own bourgeoisie is a lesser evil***. As Wilhelm Liebknecht said, “Not a man and not a penny” for bourgeois militarism.

In wars of imperialist depredation against colonial, semicolonial or dependent nations, the duty of the proletariat in every country is to aid the oppressed nations against the imperialists, while maintaining complete political independence from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist forces.

The proletariat must give unconditional military defense against imperialism to the deformed workers states in China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba. Our position flows from the proletarian class character of these states, embodied in the collectivized property relations—nationalized property, planned economy, monopoly of foreign trade and banking, etc.—established by social revolutions that destroyed capitalism. Despite the bureaucratic deformations of these states, our defense of them against the class enemy is unconditional, i.e., it does not depend on the prior overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracies, nor does it depend upon the circumstances and immediate causes of the conflict.

The drive toward imperialist war is inherent in the capitalist system. Today’s ideologues of “globalization” are projecting a false vision that the rival interests of competing nation states have been transcended in this post-Soviet period. This is nothing other than a rehash of Karl Kautsky’s theory of “ultra-imperialism.” As Lenin wrote in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*:

“Compare this reality—the vast diversity of economic and political conditions, the extreme disparity in the rate of development of the various countries, etc., and the violent struggles among the imperialist states—with Kautsky’s silly little fable about ‘peaceful’ ultra-imperialism.... Is not American and other finance capital, which divided the whole world peacefully with Germany’s participation in, for example, the international rail syndicate, or in the international mercantile shipping trust, now engaged

in **redividing** the world on the basis of a new relation of forces that is being changed by methods **anything but** peaceful?”

9. The National Question and the Right of All Nations to Self-Determination

As Trotsky wrote in “War and the Fourth International” (10 June 1934):

“Having used the nation for its development, capitalism has nowhere, in no single corner of the world, solved fully the national problem.”

The right of self-determination applies to all nations. The struggle by the proletarian leadership for **self-determination** of the oppressed nations is a powerful tool to break the grip of petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders on the masses. The ICL stands by Lenin’s polemic (*The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, February-May 1914) wherein Lenin states: “The interests of the working class and of its struggle against capitalism demand complete solidarity and the closest unity of the workers of all nations; they demand resistance to the nationalist policy of the bourgeoisie of every nationality.”

We stand by Lenin’s argument that “Successful struggle against exploitation requires that the proletariat be free of nationalism, and be absolutely neutral, so to speak, in the fight for supremacy that is going on among the bourgeoisie of the various nations. If the proletariat of any one nation gives the slightest support to the privileges of its ‘own’ national bourgeoisie, that will inevitably rouse distrust among the proletariat of another nation; it will weaken the international class solidarity of the workers and divide them, to the delight of the bourgeoisie. Repudiation of the right to self-determination or to secession inevitably means, in practice, support for the privileges of the dominant nation.”

However, when the particular demand for national self-determination—a democratic demand—contradicts class questions or the general needs of the class struggle, we oppose its exercise. As Lenin noted in “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up” (July 1916): “The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a **small part** of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) **world** movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected.” Lenin strongly supported Poland’s right of self-determination, arguing this point against other revolutionary socialists like Rosa Luxemburg. But in the particular context of World War I, Lenin argued: “The Polish Social-Democrats cannot, at the moment, raise the slogan of Poland’s independence, for the Poles, as proletarian internationalists, can do **nothing** about it without stooping, like the ‘Fracy’ [social-chauvinists], to humble servitude to **one** of the imperialist monarchies.”

In our approach to the interpenetration of two or more peoples claiming the same territory, the ICL is guided by the practice and experience of the Bolsheviks, in particular the discussion on the Ukraine at the Second Congress of the Communist International. The ICL elaborated on this position with regard to the Near East, Cyprus, Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia. In such situations, under capitalism—in which the state power is necessarily dominated by a single nation—the democratic right of national self-determination cannot be achieved for one people without violating the national rights of

the other. Hence these conflicts cannot be equitably resolved within a capitalist framework. The precondition for a democratic solution is to sweep away all the bourgeoisies of the region.

10. Colonial Revolution, Permanent Revolution and the “Guerrilla Road”

Experience since the Second World War has completely validated the Trotskyist theory of the permanent revolution which declares that in the imperialist epoch the bourgeois-democratic revolution can be completed only by a proletarian dictatorship supported by the peasantry. Only under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat can the colonial and semicolonial countries obtain genuine national emancipation. To open the road to socialism requires the extension of the revolution to the advanced capitalist countries.

The October Revolution itself refuted the Menshevik idea of the revolution as stagist; the Mensheviks proposed a political bloc with the liberal Cadet party to place the bourgeoisie in power. “The Menshevik idea of union between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie actually meant submission of the workers as well as the peasants to the liberals.... In 1905 the Mensheviks merely lacked the courage to draw all the necessary inferences from their theory of ‘bourgeois’ revolution. In 1917, pursuing their ideas to the bitter end, they broke their neck” (Trotsky, *Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution*, first published 1942).

Lenin’s Bolsheviks were closer to Trotsky’s view in that they insisted that the Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of leading a democratic revolution. The Bolsheviks argued for an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, culminating in the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,” a flawed slogan projecting a state defending the interests of two different classes. In 1917 following the February revolution, it took a sharp fight within the Bolshevik Party for Lenin’s “April Theses” line for the dictatorship of the proletariat to prevail. However the failure of the Bolshevik Party to explicitly recognize the vindication of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution by the October Revolution and the failure to explicitly repudiate the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” then became a conduit for the forces later posturing as the Bolshevik “old guard” (e.g. Stalin) to attack Trotsky, the theory of permanent revolution and the revolutionary internationalist premises and implications of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Trotsky wrote in his 29 March 1930 introduction to the German edition of *The Permanent Revolution*:

“Under the guise of providing an economic justification for internationalism, Stalin in reality presents a justification for national socialism. It is false that world economy is simply a sum of national parts of one and the same type. It is false that the specific features are ‘merely supplementary to the general features,’ like warts on a face. In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process.”

In *The Permanent Revolution* (30 November 1929) Trotsky explained:

“Under the conditions of the imperialist epoch the national democratic revolution can be carried through to a victorious end only when the social and political relationships of the country are mature for putting the proletariat in power as the leader of the masses of the people. And if this is not yet the case? Then the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses.

“A backward colonial or semi-colonial country, the proletariat of which is insufficiently prepared to unite the peasantry and take power, is thereby incapable of bringing the democratic revolution to its conclusion.”

The partial character of the anti-capitalist revolutions in the colonial world leads us to reaffirm the Marxist-Leninist concept of the proletariat as the only social force capable of making the socialist revolution. The ICL fundamentally opposes the Maoist doctrine, rooted in Menshevism and Stalinist reformism, which rejects the vanguard role of the working class and substitutes peasant-based guerrilla warfare as the road to socialism.

A further extension of Marxism contributed by the International Communist League in analyzing Stalinism was our understanding of the Cuban Revolution (see *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8, “Cuba and Marxist Theory”), which retrospectively illuminated the course of the Yugoslav and Chinese Revolutions. In Cuba, a petty-bourgeois movement under exceptional circumstances—the absence of the working class as a contender for social power in its own right, the flight of the national bourgeoisie and hostile imperialist encirclement, and a lifeline thrown by the Soviet Union—did overthrow the old Batista dictatorship and eventually smash capitalist property relations. But Castroism (or other peasant-based guerrilla movements) cannot bring the working class to political power.

Under the most *favorable* historic circumstances conceivable, the petty-bourgeois peasantry was only capable of creating a bureaucratically deformed workers state, that is, a state of the same order as that issuing out of the political counterrevolution of Stalin in the Soviet Union, an anti-working-class regime which blocked the possibilities to extend social revolution into Latin America and North America, and suppressed Cuba’s further development in the direction of socialism. To place the working class in political power and open the road to socialist development requires a supplemental *political* revolution led by a Trotskyist party. With the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state and consequently no readily available lifeline against imperialist encirclement, the narrow historical opening in which petty-bourgeois forces were able to overturn local capitalist rule has been closed, underscoring the Trotskyist perspective of permanent revolution.

11. The Popular Front: Not a Tactic But the Greatest Crime

From Spain in 1936 to Chile in 1973, ripe opportunities for proletarian revolution have been derailed through the mechanism of the popular front, which ties the exploited to their exploiters, and opens the road to fascist and bonapartist dictatorships. Leon Trotsky asserted: “By lulling the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions, by paralyzing their will to struggle, the People’s Front creates

favorable conditions for the victory of fascism. The policy of coalition with the bourgeoisie must be paid for by the proletariat with years of new torments and sacrifice, if not by decades of fascist terror” (“The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International,” July 1936).

Like Lenin and Trotsky, the ICL opposes in principle any coalition with capitalist parties (“popular fronts”) whether in government or in opposition, and we oppose voting for workers parties in popular fronts. Parliamentary governments formed by reformist workers parties (“bourgeois workers parties” as defined by Lenin) are capitalist governments administering capitalist rule (for example, various governments of the Labour Party in Britain). In cases where a mass reformist workers party presents itself as representing the interests of the working class independently of and against the parties of the bourgeoisie, it may be appropriate for revolutionaries to apply the tactic of critical support (“as a rope supports a hanged man”). Such critical electoral support serves as a means for revolutionists to exacerbate the contradiction between the proletarian base and the pro-capitalist leadership. However, the inclusion of even small non-proletarian political formations (such as liberals or eco-faddist “Greens” in the West, or bourgeois nationalists) acts as a guarantor of the bourgeois program, suppressing this contradiction.

The “anti-imperialist united front” is the particular form that class collaboration most often assumes in the colonial and ex-colonial countries, from the liquidation of the Chinese Communist Party into Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang in the 1920s to decades of prostration of the South African “left” before the African National Congress (ANC), which has become the imperialist-sponsored front men for neo-apartheid capitalism. Today in Latin America, “anti-Yankee” nationalism is the main tool whereby militant workers and insurgent peasants are induced to place their hopes in bourgeois “radicals.” Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution is the alternative to placing confidence in fantasies resting upon the backward, imperialist-dependent bourgeoisie of one’s own oppressed country as the vehicle for liberation.

12. The Revolutionary Party: Its Program, Organization, and Discipline

“Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer” (Leon Trotsky, *The Lessons of October* [1924]). We strive to build the revolutionary party, the instrument for bringing political consciousness to the proletariat, seeking to become the main offensive and guiding force through which the working class makes and consolidates the socialist revolution. Our aim is a revolutionary general staff whose leading cadre must be trained and tested in the class struggle. The party fights to gain the leadership of the class on the basis of its program and revolutionary determination; it seeks to understand the whole of the past in order to assess the present situation. The challenge is to recognize and boldly respond to the revolutionary moment when it comes, that moment when the forces of the proletariat are most confident and prepared and the forces of the old order most demoralized and disorganized. In such a revolutionary party is crystallized the aspiration of the masses to obtain their freedom; it symbolizes their revolutionary will and will be the instrument of their victory.

As Trotsky wrote in the Transitional Program:

“The strategic task of the next period—a prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda, and organization—consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of **transitional demands**, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”

The vanguard party must devote the same conscious attention to the question of party leadership as the party devotes to fighting for the consciousness of the advanced workers. In “The Mistakes of Rightist Elements of the Communist League on the Trade Union Question” (4 January 1931), Trotsky wrote:

“Whatever may be the social sources and political causes of opportunistic mistakes and deviations, they are always reduced ideologically to an erroneous understanding of the revolutionary party, of its relation to other proletarian organizations and to the class as a whole.”

The united front is a primary tactic especially in unsettled periods to both mobilize a broad mass in struggle for a common demand and to strengthen the authority of the vanguard party within the class. The formula of “march separately, strike together” means action in unison in defense of the workers’ interests, while allowing for the clash of competing opinions in the context of a common political experience.

The communist tactic of the united front allows the vanguard to approach separate and otherwise hostile organizations for common action. It is counterposed to the “Third Period” Stalinists’ “united front from below” which demands unity with the “ranks” against their leaders, reinforcing organizational lines and precluding joint action. A united front requires full “freedom of criticism”—i.e., participants are able to present their own slogans and propaganda.

A hallmark of retreat from revolutionary purpose is the practice of propaganda blocs: the subordination of the proletarian program to opportunists in the name of “unity.” A similar purpose is served by the idea of a “strategic united front” which transforms the united front into a hoped-for standing “coalition” on a lowest-common-denominator program. As against all such schemes, the revolutionary party cannot be built without a fight for political clarity and relentless exposure of reformist and especially centrist forces.

The ICL stands on the principles and record of the International Labor Defense, the American arm of the early Comintern’s International Red Aid. We seek to carry forward the ILD’s heritage of non-sectarian, partisan class-struggle defense work, defending irrespective of their political views militant fighters for the working class and oppressed. While utilizing all democratic rights available from the bourgeois legal system, we seek to mobilize mass labor-centered protest, placing all our faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the “justice” of the bourgeois courts. The greatest obstacle to reviving the traditions of labor solidarity is the infamous practices of Stalinist and social-

democratic organizations: violence within the workers movement, slander of opponents, and manipulative “front group” maneuvering.

The organizational principle within the International Communist League is **democratic-centralism**, a balance between internal democracy and functional discipline. As a combat organization, the revolutionary vanguard must be capable of unified and decisive action at all times in the class struggle. All members must be mobilized to carry out the decisions of the majority; authority must be centralized in its elected leadership which interprets tactically the organization’s program. Internal democracy permits the collective determination of the party’s line in accord with the needs felt by the party’s ranks who are closest to the class as a whole. The right to factional democracy is vital to a living movement; the very existence of this right helps to channel differences into less absorbing means of resolution.

The **discipline** of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) flows from its program and purpose, the victory of the socialist revolution and the liberation of all mankind.

13. We Will Intervene to Change History!

“Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action.” The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is in the forefront of the struggle for a socialist future. The ICL is the only international organization which presently has a correct general conception of the world situation and of the tasks facing the world proletariat. The disparity between our small numbers and the power of our program is huge. Currently the sections of the ICL are or aim to be **fighting propaganda groups**. Our immediate task is the education and formation of cadres, recruiting the most advanced layers of workers and youth by winning them over to our full program through explanation of our views in sharp counterposition to those of our centrist opponents. Revolutionary regroupments on the program of Leninist internationalism are the means to resolve the disproportion between our small forces and our task.

Like Lenin’s Bolsheviks, our aim is to fuse together intellectual and proletarian elements, above all through the development and struggle of communist industrial fractions. By means of propagandistic literature one can educate the first cadres, but one cannot rally the proletarian vanguard which lives neither in a circle nor in a schoolroom but in a class society, in a factory, in the organizations of the masses, a vanguard to whom one must know how to speak in the language of its experiences. Even the best prepared propagandist cadres will inevitably disintegrate if they do not find contact with the daily struggle of the masses.

Communist work in the trade unions must be oriented to winning over the base, not unprincipled blocs and maneuvers at the top. Absolutely essential is the struggle for the complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state. Use of the bourgeois courts against political opponents in the trade unions or the workers movement is a breach of the principle of proletarian independence and an attack on the labor movement’s strength. Inviting the class enemy to intervene in the unions’ internal affairs promotes illusions in bourgeois democracy by portraying the state as “neutral” between classes. Police are not “workers in uniform” but the hired guns of the capitalist state; they have no place in the workers’ organizations. The ICL fights for “cops out of the

unions.” Our fight for the principle of proletarian independence from the state is underscored by the tendency pointed out by Trotsky in his unfinished 1940 essay, “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,” for the reformist trade unions to grow ever more intertwined with the state.

Communists seek to build the strongest possible unity of the working class against the capitalist exploiters; therefore, we oppose craft divisions in the proletariat and stand for **industrial unionism**, and oppose the splitting of the working class into competing unions based on different political tendencies or ethnic groupings. In contradistinction, the task of the communist vanguard is to clarify and sharpen the differences between competing political tendencies in order to assemble the cadre for a Leninist party. In Lenin’s time these different political tasks were reflected in different organizational forms: the Comintern composed of the party organizations representing the unique Bolshevik political program and the Profintern representing the struggle for the unity of the working class in the unions.

We believe that the reforging of a communist Fourth International, built of authentic communist parties on every inhabited continent and tested in thoroughgoing intervention in the class struggle, will be arduous and often dangerous. The road forward for all of humanity is for the presently small forces adhering to the revolutionary program of Lenin and Trotsky to forge parties with the experience, willpower and authority among the masses to lead successful proletarian revolutions. Yet as we seek to bring this program to bear among the world’s workers and oppressed, we must recognize that the possession of the technology of nuclear holocaust by an irrational imperialist ruling class foreshortens the possibilities: we don’t have a lot of time.

We are guided by the precepts and practices of comrades such as Lenin and Trotsky:

“To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International.”

—“The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International” (1938)

These are the rules of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) as we go forward in the historical task of leading the working class to the victory of world socialism!

—February 1998